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U.S. Averts Curb on Funds For Anti-Nicaragua Action

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The Reagan administration yesterday forestalled any action to cut off U.S. funding for covert operations against Nicaragua by asking the members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to take a CIA-guided tour of the secret front this weekend.

The invitation, delivered by CIA Director William J. Casey during a closed session of the committee yesterday morning, was immediately accepted by the panel's Republican members and several Democrats, according to participants.

At one point, as many as six members were signed up to leave this Sunday on CIA planes and not return until Tuesday afternoon.

The effect of the CIA invitation was to suspend until after President's Reagan's address to a joint session of Congress Wednesday night the committee's deliberations on whether to cut off or further restrict CIA support for guerrillas waging an insurrectional campaign against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

One Democratic member of the committee, Rep. Norman Y. Mineta of California, said he will accept the CIA invitation, but doubted whether the trip or the president's speech will blunt the determination of the committee's Democratic majority to constrain the CIA further, perhaps by tightening the Boland amendment, named for the committee's chairman, Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.).

The amendment, adopted by Congress last December, prohibits any U.S. assistance "for the purpose" of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provok-

ing a military exchange between Nicaragua and neighboring Honduras.

"I think there is a consensus on the committee to do something to cut off the covert activities," Mineta said. Boland would not comment yesterday after more than six hours of committee discussions with Secretary of State George P. Shultz Wednesday evening and Casey yesterday morning and afternoon.

One congressional source said the members who go on the tour will receive briefings from CIA officials who run the day-to-day covert activities in conjunction with Honduran military officials from bases near the Honduran-Nicaraguan border.

In the Senate, meanwhile, an attempt by Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.) to call a secret session next Tuesday so that members can be briefed by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence also appeared headed for delay. An aide to Dodd said the office of Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) indicated yesterday that Baker wanted to put off the secret session until after Reagan's address on Wednesday.

During yesterday's House committee session, Republican members strenuously defended the legality of the administration's covert efforts to stop the flow of arms from Nicaragua to leftist insurgents in El Salvador.

These members pointed to fresh evidence of possible Soviet involvement in gunrunning to El Salvador with the detention of Libyan aircraft filled with munitions disguised as medical supplies bound for Nicaragua.

But the momentum of Democratic members to shut down the covert program was also strong, one Republican



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... says he will accept the CIA invitation

said. Mineta is the third Democratic member of the panel to state openly that the administration is not complying with the Boland amendment. Last week Boland said that the government was in "apparent violation," and Rep. Wyche Fowler Jr. (D-Ga.) said the CIA "is not fully adhering" to the law.

Mineta suggested that the operation is "out of control" and has increased in scope and purpose since authorized in November, 1981. He said he feared that committee members were being "set up" by the administration, which is claiming that all CIA activities in the region are legal and have been conducted with the full consent of the congressional intelligence oversight committees.

The House members who expressed immediate interest in the tour yesterday included Bob Stump (D-Ariz.), C.W. Bill Young (R-Fla.) and Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), according to participants.